

# Strengthening Our Foundations and Our Future

## Lessons Learned from After School Matters Summer 2023

### Overview

Heading into Summer 2023, After School Matters (ASM) – a leading provider of out-of-school-time programs for Chicago teens – leveraged feedback from our community to create new trainings, supports, and program opportunities that were focused on strengthening our foundations while also thinking ahead to our future.

To evaluate this approach, survey data was collected and analyzed from over 4,500 youth, 1,200+ parents/guardians, and hundreds of instructors. As you will see in this report, **instructors created engaging, supportive, and safe learning environments** where more than 10,000 teens across the city were able to discover their passions, develop new skills, foster connections, and find a place where they belong. Findings also showed **improvements in key areas, such as teen engagement and belonging**, suggesting the strategies employed by instructors and staff had a positive impact.

Learn more about the experiences of our teens, instructors, and parents/guardians below!

### Summer 2023



**674**  
Programs



**10,811**  
Opportunities Filled



**263**  
Program Sites



**120**  
Community Partners



**64**  
Community Areas Served

### ASM's Program Model

ASM is a nonprofit organization that provides after-school and summer opportunities to Chicago public high school teens to explore their passions and develop their talents, while also gaining critical skills for work, college, and beyond. ASM programs are project-based, led by industry experts, and provide a pathway to progress in skills development and independence. Teens earn a stipend while participating in programs in the arts, communications and leadership, sports, and STEM. Over the span of three decades, ASM has impacted more than 400,000 teens throughout Chicago.

**Safe Space + Connections to Caring Adults + Teen-Centered, Project-Based Programming + Incentives to Participate =**

High  
Engagement



Sense of  
Belonging



Skills  
Development



Feelings  
of Safety



Sense  
of Hope

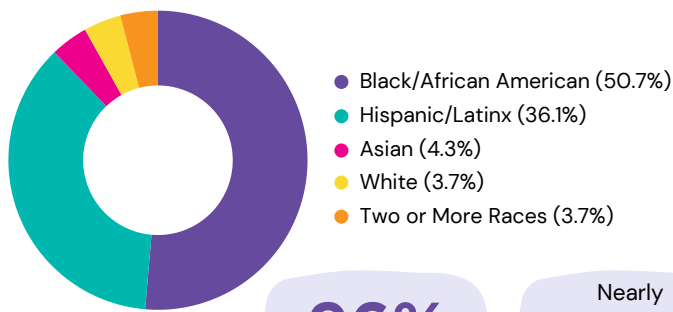


Preparation  
for the Future



# Who We Served

In Summer 2023, ASM engaged a diverse population of **10,000+ youth** between ages 13–23 from across Chicago.



**96%**  
of teens identify as people of color.

Nearly  
**3 in 4**  
teens live in areas with high levels of poverty.

“I’ve been in ASM for about four years. It’s been impactful in my life throughout each year. Staff members guided me through issues and now I’ve grown and become an assistant. I learned new skills. I discovered that I want to become an art teacher, which is going to be my career in college. This program helped me to see what I want to pursue in the future.”

–ASM Teen


## What We Learned

### Teen Experiences

Overall, teens reported having positive, satisfying, and meaningful experiences over the summer.

#### ENGAGEMENT

ASM programs provided teens with a **fun, challenging, and engaging experience** over the summer.


 **91%** of teens attended their program on a daily basis.


 **89%** of teens felt challenged to try new things.


 **87%** of teens said they had the opportunity to explore their own interests.

#### SKILL BUILDING

ASM’s programs provided teens with **opportunities to build and strengthen** skills that will prepare them for college, work, and beyond.


 **90%** said they improved or learned new skills.


 **84%** said they gained confidence in their skills or abilities.


 **72%** said their program showed them new college/career pathways.

#### SAFETY & SUPPORT

Teens felt their programs provided safe, supportive spaces where **they could develop meaningful relationships and be themselves.**

 **92%** of teens felt more hopeful about their future after participating.

 **90%** of teens felt safe in their program.

 **88%** of teens felt a sense of belonging in their program.

#### GROWTH FROM SUMMER TO SUMMER



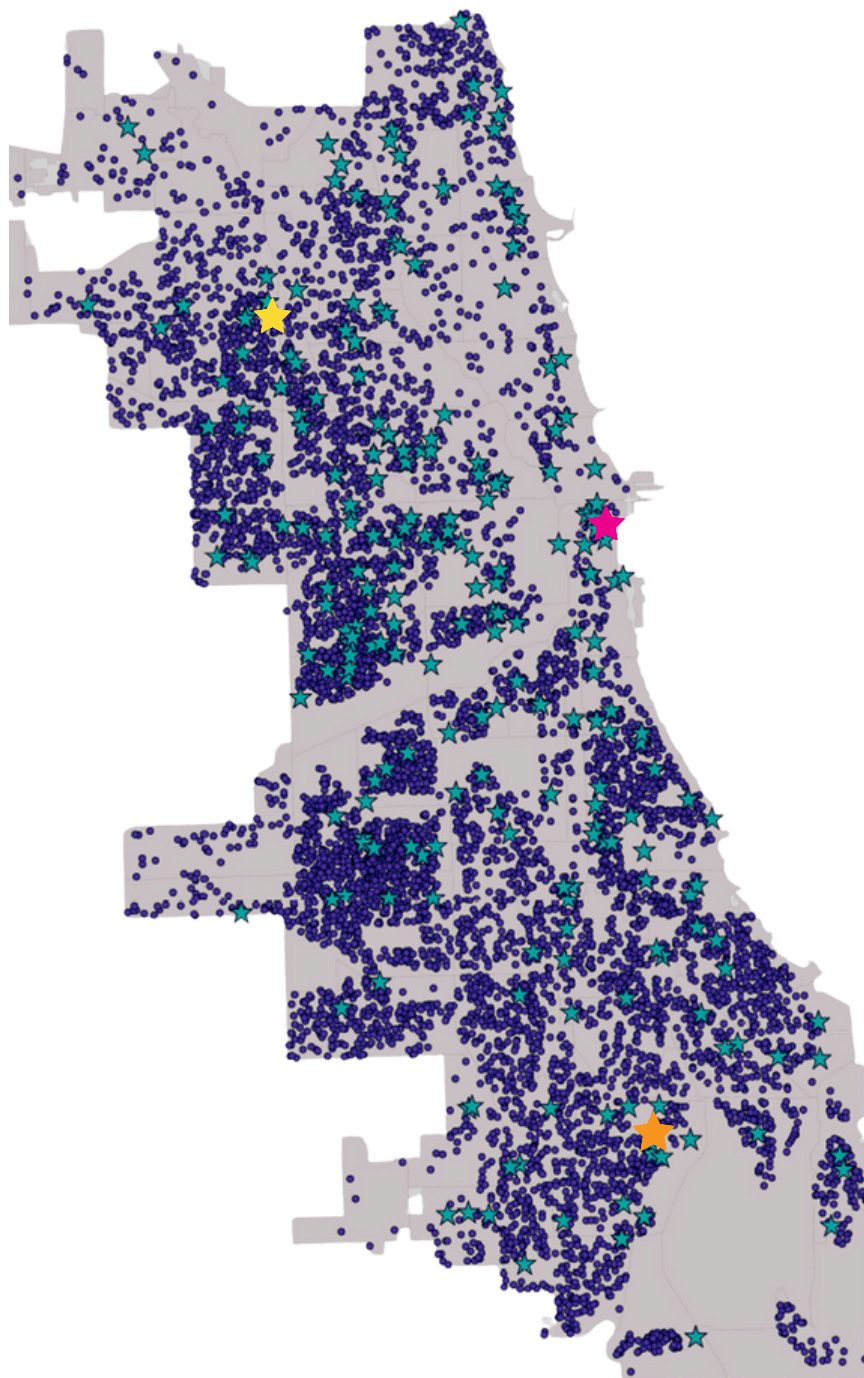
Teens’ program experiences were comparable and in some cases even better than prior summers. Teens’ engagement improved significantly as did their feelings of safety and belonging.

“This was a hands-on opportunity to learn about urban farming/agriculture, hydroponics, growing food to be distributed to the local community, etc. and I didn't want to pass up the opportunity just because it was a far commute. Environmental sciences and urban planning is something I'm really interested in, and this opportunity aligned with my goals, so I went with it.”

-ASM Teen

## Teen Residences and Program Locations

Teen participants came from all 77 of Chicago's community areas to attend programs across the city.



### MAP LEGEND

- ASM Teen Addresses (N = 10,215)
- ★ ASM Program Locations (N = 263)
- ★ The Michael and Karyn Lutz Center for After School Matters
- ★ Gallery 37 Center for the Arts
- ★ After School Matters at Gately Park

## TEEN TRAVEL TO PROGRAMMING



**1 in 2**

teens used public transit to get to their program



**9 in 10**

teens traveled outside of their community to attend programs



**3.6 miles**


is the average distance teens traveled to their program







## Instructor Experiences

*Instructors were inspired by teens and valued their experiences running programs.*

 **98%** felt connected to the youth they served.

 **94%** said they were proud of what they accomplished with their youth.

 **92%** found joy leading their programs even when it was hard at times.

### GROWTH FROM SUMMER TO SUMMER



Instructors felt even more prepared and supported by ASM in Summer 2023 than in prior summers.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Instructors increased their professional skills and were satisfied with ASM's professional development offerings.*



**93%**

said their facilitators were well-prepared and helpful.



**90%**

said the training contained content they can use in their work.



**88%**

reported increasing their professional skills.

Looking ahead, many instructors said they would be interested in trainings focusing on:

Teen and  
Instructor  
Mental Health

Youth  
Development  
Best Practices

Building  
Relationships

Learning and  
Collaborating with  
Other Instructors

“ ***This was my first summer teaching with ASM and I enjoyed it immensely. The teens were great, I was able to receive all necessary teaching resources/art materials and felt very supported by the ASM staff. I most appreciated the freedom I was provided in building my curriculum and classroom structure/norms. My program coordinator was very responsive to my questions and requests.*** ”

-ASM Instructor

“ I appreciate programs such as ASM, for providing a safe place for teens to go during the summer months. ASM encourages kids to be professional, and responsible while learning a skill. The stipend has allowed my daughter to pay for school supplies and clothes for the upcoming school year. ”

-ASM Parent/Guardian

## Parents' & Guardians' Experiences

The overwhelming majority of parents and guardians felt that ASM provided their teens with a fun, safe place to go where they gained new skills and friendships.



**94%** said they were satisfied with ASM.



**92%** said their teen(s) enjoyed their experience.



**85%** said their teen(s) gained new skills.



**91%** felt ASM provided a safe place for teens to go.



**79%** said their teen(s) developed new friendships or strengthened existing relationships.



## The Takeaway

Findings from this report suggest that instructors were supported and empowered to create high-quality program environments where teens gained new experiences, deepened relationships, and developed skills that will set them up for future success. In particular, ASM learned:



Teens developed a **strong sense of belonging, connection, and hope for the future.**



ASM programs supported teens' college and career readiness by **strengthening their 21st century and content area skills while exposing them to new career pathways.**



Teens and parents felt **ASM programs were safe spaces in the city where teens could learn and grow.**



**Most instructors felt connected to and inspired by their youth and satisfied with ASM.**



Improvement in key areas, including teen engagement, teens' feelings of belonging and safety, and instructors' feelings of support, suggests that **the strategies ASM instructors and staff employed made an impact.**

ASM is already using these and other insights to continue to strengthen our foundations and future initiatives in ways that will ensure teens have warm, engaging, and impactful spaces they want to come back to time and time again.